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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effects of adult students with multiple educational attainment levels on classroom practice and student persistence in an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) basic writing course at a U.S. community college. The part-time status of the instructor exacerbated the challenges of teaching students whose educational attainment ranged form less than high school to MD and Ph.D degrees. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of forms of capital and Pratt's notion of the classroom as a "contact zone," the paper analyzes the different forms of capital that students had at their disposal. The less educated immigrant and refugee students were the first to leave the course, which ended with a 75% attrition rate. The better-educated students drew on economic and social capital to take advantage of the free programs offered by the community college. Of those who left the course, the less educated students struggled to persist in higher education, while those with more cultural capital managed to hang on and obtain more schooling. This study illustrates the pedagogic challenges of the contemporary ESL basic writing classroom, a contact zone comprised not only of diverse students but also of marginalized adjunct faculty. Larger economic forces are drawing more limited English speakers to the United States, creating demand for ESL instructors which due to supply and cost issues must increasingly be part-time. It is argued that this entire issue should be examined at a higher level. (Contains 30 references.) (KFT)

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# Adult ESL Students in the Contact Zone: Exploring the Effects of Multiple Educational Attainment Levels on the Community College Writing Classroom

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## Abstract

As immigration to the United States continues to rise, increasing numbers of nonnative speakers of English are turning to higher education to prepare for work in an information-based economy. This paper examines the effects of adult students with multiple educational attainment levels on classroom practice and student persistence in an ESL basic writing course at a U.S. community college. The part-time adjunct status of the instructor exacerbated the challenges of teaching students whose educational attainment ranged from less than high school to MD/Ph.D. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of forms of capital and Pratt's notion of the classroom as a 'contact zone', the paper analyzes the different forms of capital that students had at their disposal. The less-educated immigrant/refugee students were the first to leave the course, which ended with a 75% attrition rate. The better-educated students drew on economic and cultural capital to take advantage of the free programs offered by the community college. Of those who left the course, the less-educated students struggled to persist in higher education, while those with more cultural capital managed to persist at the community college or in four-year institutions.

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*I just wondered, some foreigners study, they just come here to learn English, they probably don't speak English that well. How come they [are] able to pass those [university] degrees?*—Saky, 24, Laotian refugee student

Immigration, Education, and the 'New' Economy

After a 50-year lull, around 1980 a steep rise in immigration to the United States began that shows no signs of abating (Portes and Rumbaut, 1990). With approximately 700,000 newcomers entering the United States annually (Smoke, 1999), the foreign-born population has surpassed 10 percent of the population (Lollock, 2001). Of these, 43% fall between the ages of 25 and 44 (Ibid.) Historically, the American educational system has played a large role in assimilating immigrants into society (Aronowitz, 2000). While today's immigrants do not all seek "assimilation" in its historical sense, they recognize education as the route to leaving behind low-level custodial, care-giving, and agricultural jobs (Boyle, 1999; Ungar, 1995). Furthermore, as the changing global economy requires increased levels of education of everyone, greater numbers of adult immigrants are seeking education and training in community colleges (Greider, 1997; Hull, 1997). At the same time, the demands of the global economy have affected staffing at community colleges, with contingent part-time faculty comprising the majority of the instructional staff at many colleges (Brill, 1999; Harris, 2001; Killen 1998). This hiring trend affects the quality of instruction in important ways.

English language learners form an increasingly large presence at community colleges (Arenson, 1998), often requiring basic, or pre-college, education courses in English language and composition before entering academic or vocational programs. The influx of nonnative speakers of English (NNS) into community colleges

highlights the historic contradictions of their institutional missions and creates new challenges for faculty and administrators (Curry, 2001). One of these challenges stems from the differential educational attainment levels of newcomers to the United States. Newcomers tend to fall into a bimodal pattern, with highly skilled professionals on one end and those with lower educational attainment on the other. In fact, in 1980 approximately 25% of legal immigrants were professionals and technicians, a higher proportion than in the native-born population (Portes and Rumbaut, 1990).

The contemporary English as a second language (ESL) classroom is populated by immigrants, political refugees, and international students or technical elites and their relatives. Students' varying attributes include race, class, gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and educational attainment. A growing body of literature has branched out from studying differences in educational levels between 'international' and 'U.S. resident' students at U.S. universities (e.g., Harklau, Losey, and Siegal, 1999; Reid, 1997; Vandrick, 1995) to examining the often more-complex diversity at community colleges and state universities (e.g., Goen and Gillotte 2000; Goto, 1999; Harklau, 2000; Sternglass, 1997). Following in this latter vein, this paper reports on research conducted in an ESL basic writing course at Monroe Community College (MCC).[1] At MCC free grant-funded noncredit courses such as ESL and basic writing are offered by the Alternative Learning Division (ALD). Regardless of their educational goals, English language learners at MTC often move to basic education courses as the next step after the ALD's five levels of ESL.

In many ways the course, Basic Writing 3 (BW3), was typical: It was taught by a part-time instructor, had a wide variety of students, and attempted to grapple with language learning and composition instruction simultaneously. As in many basic

[1] The institution and participants in this study have been given pseudonyms.

writing courses, its curriculum was designed to cover descriptive, narrative, and argumentative genres of writing and introduce students to library research. In other ways the course may have been atypical. ALD policies allow students to select courses themselves, despite the results of placement examinations. Students may repeat basic education courses an unlimited number of times. And despite policies that restrict the free courses offered by the ALD to "American citizens, permanent residents or refugees" (ESL Program pamphlet), students outside these categories—international students and their family members—regularly manage to enter ESL and basic education classes. About two-thirds of the students in BW3 held bachelor's or graduate degrees from their native countries. It is partly because some of these students were able to bend the policies on admission to the ALD that such a large proportion of well-educated students arrived in the class. BW3 thus complicates the stereotypical understanding of ESL community college students as having low educational attainment.

This paper examines how the presence of these highly educated NNS students affected classroom practice and student persistence in BW3. It pinpoints the ways in which the instructor oriented the course toward the demands and classroom contributions of the well-educated students. As a result, the less-educated students became marginalized in the classroom and subsequently left, contributing to the course's 75% attrition rate. At the same time, however, factors such as difficult working conditions in the ALD hindered the instructor's efforts to reach all the BW3 students.

## Theoretical Framework

To analyze the events and interactions that occurred in the BW3 classroom, I draw on Pierre Bourdieu's (1990, 1998) theory of forms of capital—economic, cultural, and symbolic—that have exchange value in the educational field. Cultural capital is a currency primarily derived from the family. To Bourdieu, "families are corporate bodies [with] a tendency to perpetuate their social being, with all its power and privileges, which is at the basis of reproductive strategies" (1998, p. 19), including educational strategies that reproduce social classes. As McDonough (1998) notes,

> Although all classes have their own forms of cultural capital, the most socially and economically valued forms are those possessed by the middle and upper classes, which are transmitted to their offspring as a supplement to economic capital in order to maintain class status and privilege across generations. (p. 183)

Inherited cultural capital provides the benefits of early and unconscious induction:

> The embodied cultural capital of the previous generations functions as a sort of advance (both a head-start and a credit) which, by providing from the outset the example of culture incarnated in familiar models, enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture, from the beginning, that is, in the most unconscious and impalpable way—and to dispense with the labour of deculturation, correction, and retraining that is needed to undo the effects of inappropriate learning. (Bourdieu,1984, pp. 70-71)

Of the aspects of cultural capital, the most relevant here is "the command of valued cultural knowledge" (Olneck, 2000, p. 319). "Within the myriad of formal and informal acts of evaluation that schools enact, particular knowledge, linguistic behavior, styles, dispositions, and modes of thought and expression are given value" (Olneck, 2000, p. 320). Although educational attainment and cultural capital are not exact synonyms, for the purposes of this paper educational attainment may stand in for the forms of cultural capital that are valued and validated in the educational system. The notion of forms of capital is useful in studying the experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, especially to consider how imported

forms of capital function in a new social environment. For example, the symbolic capital of knowing the rituals and conventions of higher education, although they vary in some ways from one culture to another, carries much of its value through the process of migration.

I also draw upon Pratt's (1991) idea of the "contact zone," which she defines as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (p. 34). The contact zone challenges the idea of a homogenous "linguistic community" in the classroom, one which "assume[s] a unified and homogenous social world in which language exists as a shared patrimony" (1991, p. 38). The notion of the 'contact zone' has been seen as useful in conceptualizing a pedagogic space that is not conflict-free and criticized for leaning toward a pedagogy of 'cultural tourism' (Lu, 1996) that romanticizes the difficulty of engaging with conflict (see also Goto, 1999; Harris, 1995; Miller, 1994). Viewing the workings of cultural capital within the contact zone of the ESL composition classroom proves useful for considering the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds as they confront the demands of an information-based U. S. economy.

## Context of the Study

The study took place during one 15-week semester of Basic Writing 3, which met twice a week for two hours each time. I made ethnographic observations, audiotaping the classes and writing field notes. My role in the classroom was primarily as an observer but I occasionally participated in class activities and helped students. I conducted interviews with six students, the course instructor (twice), and

the ALD lead teacher and dean. Interviewed students were selected to represent a range of demographic features such as ethnic background, age, and educational objectives, and to include both students who left and students who stayed in the course. A second round of interviews with these key students was conducted one year after the original study to explore their subsequent educational experiences. Supplemental data were gathered in the form of the course textbook (McWhorter, 1997) and instructional materials, student essays, institutional documents, publications, and reports.

Basic Writing 3 Students

The 18 students in BW3 included 12 immigrants/refugees[2] and 6 spouses of international students or researchers at the university.[3] Twelve students had earned at least bachelor's degrees; five of these also had graduate degrees. Three of the advanced-degree holders, Olga, Irina, and Boris, were retired Russians. Katarina, a younger Russian engineer married to an American accountant, planned to become an accountant herself. All of the international student spouses held at least bachelor's degrees. One of these, Minji, a Korean woman whose husband is a research sociologist at the local university, had one bachelor's degree and was about to begin a second in music education. A family of three young Palestinians from the United Arab Emirates, Leila, Rana, and their older brother, Ali Hasan, were applying to state universities to study information technology and business. Of the refugees, Saky, a young Laotian man, had a diploma from a U.S. high school, worked full-time at a

[2] The distinction between immigrants and refugees is difficult to make without knowing why people have come to the United States. For example, the retired Russians were Jews who had fled anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union and so could be called refugees. However, the two younger Russian women were married to Americans and thus could be considered immigrants. Ahmad and Saky were refugees from the political situations in Sierra Leone and Laos, respectively. The Hasan family—Leila,

plastics manufacturing company, and wanted to become a police officer. Ahmad, a young man fleeing Sierra Leone's civil war, worked full-time at a bakery. He was attempting to pass the GED tests and wanted to become a lawyer.

As this brief introduction shows, besides having multiple educational attainment levels, the students' career and educational objectives varied widely. The class included retirees with no further educational goals, high-school dropouts aiming to pass the GED tests and go to college, high school graduates preparing for occupational programs or undergraduate degrees, and students with BAs who want to enter graduate school or start new undergraduate study.

## The Instructor and Administrators

The instructor, George Cleary, was a white, middle-aged man who had taught English as a foreign language in Mexico, but had little preparation in teaching second language composition. He was hired three weeks into the semester at the ALD. He was already teaching composition part-time in MCC's Arts and Sciences Division and ESL to migrant Mexican workers at a satellite MCC location. Cleary also worked half-time as a Spanish medical interpreter and had child-care responsibilities. Lead teacher Maureen Powell, a white, middle-aged woman, has worked at MCC since 1976. Her duties include setting up classes, hiring instructors, teaching, budgeting, and choosing textbooks. ALD dean Ricardo Garcia, a middle-aged Chicano from Texas, has worked at MCC since 1986.

## Course Attrition

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Rana, and Ali—had left the United Arab Emirates in search of educational opportunities and to escape the discrimination that Palestinians face in the UAE.

[3] Two NS students also attended the course for four classes or fewer.

As mentioned, a striking feature of the course was its 75% attrition rate.[4] Figure 1 charts the attendance rate over the course of the semester, peaking at 15 students in weeks three and four and ending with four students in week 15.

*Figure 1. Basic Writing 3 attendance*

Identifying which students left the course at which points during the semester is also interesting. Table 1 lists the final class for students who left the course, their educational attainment levels, and whether they returned to courses at MCC or other institutions in the future (if is known).

*Table 1. Student attrition points in Basic Writing 3, weeks 4-15*

By the ninth week of the semester, all of the less-educated students had dropped out. Although many well-educated students also left, my interest here is in exploring how the less-educated students' experiences in the course contributed to their exodus. In addition to cultural capital, economic capital plays a central role in students' ability to participate fully in adult education. Before exploring cultural capital, I discuss the effects of students' economic capital.

## The Role of Economic Capital

The effects of life demands—work, family, stress—on adults seeking education is well known (Comings et al., 1999). Students in BW3 shared some of

[4] Although information on attrition and persistence in adult education is difficult to obtain, this rate compares unfavorably to the 50% of ESL students surveyed nationally who persisted into the fifteenth week of their first year of adult education (National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs, 1994, p. 3).

these difficulties. For refugees such as Ahmad and Saky, who must hold one or more jobs while pursuing education, economics are crucial. Saky often worked overtime and had responsibilities for child care. Ahmad worked two jobs and was still adjusting to moving to the United States one year previously. Both men had trouble finding the time to do homework and to attend class. Ironically, their full-time work status made them ineligible for certain student loans that would have enabled them to work less. In contrast, the retired Russians did not work. Katarina and Minji also had primary responsibility for child care and did not work in paying jobs. The Hasans lived with their grandmother in Monroe and held part-time retail jobs but were also supported by their family in the United Arab Emirates. Economic capital can thus translate into access to or restriction from cultural capital. For example, because the Hasans had time to spend on campus, they were able to use the counseling and support resources available in the ALD Learning Center. Leila described meeting with an advisor, Sharon:

> *MJC*: Do you have a lot of contact with the advisor?
> *Leila*: Yeah, a lot. She's really good.
> *MJC*: Do you have regular meetings with her?
> *Leila*: In the lab only. . . And she also gives us like the college reading success classes. (INT 4/26/99)

In contrast, Saky's job presented scheduling conflicts with meeting his reading instructor, one of the few staff members with whom he felt comfortable discussing his goals:

> I don't know when the best time for, every time I try to talk to her, she have class. . . . Then she's on lunch, you know. Probably later she doesn't have a class but I have work. (INT 5/15/00)

These comments point to the limited availability of academic counseling services in the ALD and to the differential forms of capital that are crucial to students gaining access to such support services. In this instance time does equal money, as economic

capital translates into having free and flexible time for students to use the college's resources and meet with its staff members. As I will discuss, economic capital also relates directly to students' access to computers.

## Cultural Capital and Classroom Interactions

The workings of cultural capital among the well-educated students were evident in their overall circumstances and the classroom interactions. As I have noted, a number of 'ineligible' international students were able to circumvent the policy excluding them from the ALD. Many clearly understood how a writing course would further their educational goals. Once within the BW3 classroom, their cultural capital made them comfortable with the environment and the academic requirements of the course. This ease was physically manifested by the fact that the well-educated students habitually sat toward the front of the classroom. Because the course usually operated in a traditional teacher-fronted mode, students rarely moved around the classroom. The interactional structures resulting from this physical arrangement thus advantaged the students who sat nearest the instructor. He was more likely to hear their questions and to involve them in classroom interactions, although when doing textbook exercises he called on students around the classroom.

In BW3 the less-educated students became marginalized in a number of different ways. Classroom discourse demonstrated differential patterns of interactions between the instructor and different types of students. Hall (1997) points out that "the participation structures constructed in different instructional practices can lead to academic stratification" (p. 288). Her study of a high school Spanish class demonstrated how the teacher's differential ratification of student contributions gradually shifted participation patterns. Hall identified a primary group of students

that enjoyed "high participatory status" and a "secondary participation status group . . . act[ing] as supportive audience to the other group's talk" (p. 301). As a result, students in the secondary group began to doubt their ability to learn Spanish without realizing that they had effectively been silenced. Without additional evidence, Hall declined to speculate on the reasons for the "variation in teacher attention" (p. 294) that she witnessed. In this study of BW3, however, information on students' backgrounds provides support for the argument that students' forms of capital affected their differential participation levels.

In general, the less-educated students participated less, whether in being called on less or volunteering less often to participate publicly, for example, by reading aloud from their own essays or from textbook. Likewise, the degree of uptake that the instructor provided to student questions and comments varied depending on the student. The verbal contributions of the less-educated students were ratified less frequently than those of the well-educated students, perhaps because they would have required the instructor to spend time in providing more support or probing or review of previously covered material. For example, Cleary originally explained metaphor and simile on January 26. But when on February 2 he lead the class through a textbook exercise on analyzing topic sentences, Saky was taken aback by the statement, "World hunger is a crime."

> *Saky:* By the way, I have a question about that 'World hunger is a crime.' How does a crime get involved in hunger? I thought a crime gotta, somebody, you know, somebody murder someone.

Cleary allowed three or four conversational exchanges to occur before answering Saky:

> *Cleary:* I would say this, just to start over again. World hunger is a crime. Isn't that a metaphor? So it's not really a crime where they're going to arrest someone and put them in jail. They don't mean it that way. They mean it like a metaphor.

However, Cleary does not ascertain whether Saky understands metaphor or can relate this example back to the previous discussion. Instead, the discussion is continued by Irina, Petra, Minji, and Cleary himself.

Academically, the well-educated students benefited by transferring their previous general knowledge of academic practices and conventions to BW3. Many of them had taken formal English courses at school or university and thus also brought with them a metaknowledge of grammar, language-learning, and composition terminology that other students lacked. For example, Cleary introduced topic sentences: "Now what is a topic sentence? Some sort of an idea. I think you probably talked about it before, didn't you?" (FN 1/28/99). Minji replied in the affirmative, reiterating what she had learned the previous semester. Over the semester Cleary increasingly focused BW3 on grammar, and the well-educated students built on this advantage.

By the same token, students who had taken BW3 in previous semesters were familiar with the course requirements. They understood the specialized language of the textbook and the demands of its exercises, which was fortunate as Cleary rarely explained each textbook activity. For example, this exchange occurred after the class had read and discussed an article on divorce:

> *Cleary*: What I'd like you to do for next time is just use these key words and give me an idea of what the article says. Not your ideas. . . . And this will be what's called a synopsis.
> *Minji*: Not a summary?
> *Cleary*: Oh, sure, it's a summary, same thing, same thing. Synopsis is short, that's what I like. (TR 2/11/99)

Minji here displays her knowledge of the terminology of the composition classroom, recognizing 'summary' as a synonym for 'synopsis'. In contrast, the less-educated students often lagged behind trying to figure out the requirements of Cleary's in-class

and homework assignments. Saky, for example, became confused about what Cleary was asking of the students:

> *Cleary*: We're going to talk a little bit about something else I'd like you to write for me. Now, this one I said was, we're going to do two different kinds of descriptions. One's a static, static doesn't move, okay. A static description is the same as a photo. . . . Now next time, I want you to write for me next Tuesday, a dynamic description. Now that's the same as a movie. . . . It will have movement in it. It will be just like taking a movie. Yes?
> *Saky*: Can you start over?
> *Cleary*: Sure, yeah. A static description is like a photograph. It doesn't move.
> *Saky*: Yeah, but what [are] we doing?
> *Cleary*: We're going to do a dynamic description for next time. One paragraph, okay?-(TR 1/28/99)

After leaving the course, Saky explained his frustration: "He kept giving me homework, that week we have to do that, that paper we have to do that. It's really making me crazy. . . . Not really too much [homework]. I just don't know what to do" (INT 7/7/99). Reflecting on the course a year later, he said, "It's too hard for me. Maybe the teacher not cooperate, not explain me the writing paper" (INT 5/15/00).

BW3 students who planned to enter university programs in the near future also had a greater understanding of the higher education contexts into which the course was meant to feed. For example, Leila Hasan had changed her intended major from computer science to the related field of management information systems for strategic reasons: "because of the TOEFL score. They need 550 [to do] computer science. I did it twice but I only did 500, not 550. So they need over 500 for the management information systems" (INT 4/26/99). In contrast, Saky and Ahmad had only foggy notions of the paths they would need to take to become a police officer and a lawyer, respectively. Ahmad knew he needed a college degree but was stumped by the GED tests. He felt that their multiple-choice format prevented him from learning from his mistakes. Likewise, he did not see the basic education courses helping him learn subject-specific content, with the exception of mathematics. Ahmad also noted that

students from other cultures are disadvantaged by not knowing specific bits of information:

> *Ahmad*: It's the small things, you need a lot of studies, you see. But here . . . they [the tests] don't go according to the syllabus, they just bring anything from wherever. And if you are not from here it's difficult. It's very difficult. (INT 5/13/00)

A year after the study Saky had tentatively begun to investigate how to enter a law enforcement program, but was put off by technical problems such as securing a high school transcript:

> *Saky*: [It takes] two year, I think. I don't know average from high school diploma. That's a problem right there.
> *MJC*: What's a problem?
> *Saky*: I don't know my average grade, you know.
> *MJC*: From high school?
> *Saky*: Cuz I just graduate[d] but I don't really know much, you know, so I probably have a lot of bad grades in there. (INT 5/15/00)

Here we see the difference between the levels of cultural capital possessed by the better-educated students who found their way into MTC's free courses and the less-educated refugees who were trying to figure out the American system to begin to achieve their goals.

## Access to Information Technology

Related to both economic and cultural capital is the issue of information technology. The better-educated students were more adept with the information technology that the ALD assumed they would use. Structured into the course was one class period each week in the computer laboratory for students to write papers and do Internet research. Repeat students in BW3 had previously learned how to use word-processing software, search the Internet, and use electronic mail. Some students had computers at home. However, students such as Saky and Ahmad were disadvantaged

in being unfamiliar with typing and computer programs and in having limited access to computers. Saky explained, "I couldn't understand what I'm doing. I couldn't catch up [with] what my classmates [were] doing. Cuz I never learned to type before. . . . And I don't have a computer at home " (INT 7/7/99). The ALD computer lab was unlocked only for the class period. Other computers were available in the library but neither Saky nor Ahmad had time to come to campus other than when the class met. Early on, Cleary told students he would accept handwritten papers; however, in the event he refused, telling students to keep their papers and type them during the lab. Ahmad reported, "Each time he gives assignments, if I give, write my own in ink, he won't take it, you see" (INT 6/17/99). In addition to the instructor, the administrators assumed that students knew information technology. Early on Cleary asked Maureen Powell if she would orient the class to the computer laboratory. She replied, "It's up to you. These people are oriented to the lab, most of them" (FN 1/28/99), although Cleary himself and the less-educated students were not.

Students' Outcomes

Many of the well-educated students, whether they stayed or left BW3, managed to continue to academic programs in the community college or four-year universities. Minji was accepted by the flagship campus of the state university to begin a second bachelor's degree in music education. All of the Hasans were accepted by another campus of the state university (and entered the following September). In each of the two semesters after BW3, Katarina enrolled in two courses at MCC to become a tax preparer.

Partly because of the problems that the less-educated students experienced, they found it difficult to return to the college or complete subsequent courses. One

year after the study, Ahmad had not returned to the college, although he said that he planned to re-enroll. Saky had returned to MCC one year later, enrolling in Basic Writing 2 and Basic Reading 2. Despite feeling more comfortable in these courses, Saky dropped out, citing overwork and stress from a new boss as well as a lack of time for homework. He commented: "Last spring, between the year before, it's a lot different. I think I know what I'm doing now. I just don't have the time to do it" (INT 5/15/00). Like Ahmad, Saky said he planned to re-enroll at MCC.

## Meeting the Challenge

This paper has explored how students' differential forms of capital can affect their success and persistence in a course such as BW3. It raises questions about ways in which students can be better supported. A logical first place to look for answers is to consider what curricular and instructional methods can address the multiple educational levels of students within one class. As Hall posits,

> [I]t is not the case that both the teacher and students played equal roles in shaping the direction and consequences of their participation in classroom discourse. Rather, it was the teacher who, in providing differential attention to students' participation in instructional practice, created and led the students along their individual development paths. (1997, p. 308)

One response to these challenges begins with a focus on the students, adopting or creating curricular materials that start with students' current competence and scaffold them to meet their individual goals. Adult students benefit from a learner-centered pedagogy grounded in students' competence rather than perceived deficits, one that recognizes their life experience as well as intellectual and academic potential (Kutz, Groden, and Zamel, 1993). Explicit instruction about the conventions and demands of higher education courses is needed to scaffold underprepared students into the academic world. Collaborative learning (e.g., Kutz, 1991) is demonstrably more

effective than traditional skill-and-drill, teacher-fronted methods, especially for adult learners who need practice in spoken as well as written English. In BW3, the paucity of small group interactions also thwarted community building beyond students' social interactions during breaks or outside the class. The teacher-fronted style of instruction likewise precluded cross-ability groupings or pair work that could draw on the advanced knowledge of the well-educated students to help the more novice students.

Other instructional strategies include establishing classroom peer tutor pairs of the better- and less-educated students within the class or using college student tutors to help basic learners (e.g., Nitri, 1999). In fact, some instructors in the ALD attempt to implement this strategy, particularly for repeat students in basic education courses. Lead teacher Maureen Powell reported that "individual teachers have done this rather successfully in some ways. . . . We made deals with some of them [students] and we said you may continue to come to this class if you will volunteer in this situation for so many hours a week. And they did. . . . mostly with the Russians" (INT 5/26/99).

Provision of Institutional Services

In addition to improved teaching strategies, other support services are needed. For students to identify and sustain their educational goals, they must clearly understand what those goals entail in terms of education, credentials, and other factors. Students may gain this idea from guidance or placement counselors, instructors, or through personal and family connections. According to Comings et al., "the staff of the educational program must help the potential adult student define his or her goal and understand the many instructional objectives that must be accomplished on the road to meeting that goal" (1999, p. 9). Minji and Katarina stand out as having clear goals and the best sense of what they needed to do to achieve

them. Minji's age (37), her 12 or so years in the United States, and her husband's academic occupation contributed to her ability to maneuver in higher education. Likewise, Katarina identified the path toward her objective of working in accounting, helped by the fact that her husband is an accountant.

Although Ahmad and Saky had clear goals, they suffered from a lack of knowledge or advising about how to achieve them. Neither had family networks to support them in terms of their educational goals. Ahmad was alone in the United States; Saky lived with his family, but his parents did not speak English and his brother had dropped out of high school.[5] Ahmad and Saky, among others, would have benefited from counseling "addressing physiological and emotional states [that] helps students to deal with the tension, stress, and other negative emotional states that can result from poor self-efficacy and can also lead to low self-efficacy" (Comings et al., 1999, p. 8). Ahmad contented with lingering psychological trauma from the civil war in Sierra Leone and losing contact with his family. "Even now, according to the war, the news, me all the time worrying, you see, about the problem, what about the people who are there" (INT 5/13/00). Saky's comments also support the recommendation for counseling: He had left the course partly because he had "no time for homework . . . and [I] feel ashamed [of] myself, and work, you know, too much pressure" (INT 5/15/00). In a subsequent course he also fell behind. His instructor "wanted to help, but I just can't, I can't keep up so I feel feeling guilty" (INT 5/15/00).

Counseling must also take into account students' anxieties about discrimination. Saky was hesitant to consult with ALD counselors because they might

[5] BW3 students' need for advising accords with the findings of the National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (NEAEP) that students "enrolled in programs that reported providing a large number of support services logged, on average, far more hours [in class] than those enrolled in programs that provided fewer support services" (1994, p. 2). However, NEAEP also found that ESL students were the least likely to use such support services, with only 15% of those surveyed taking advantage of them.

be racist: "Sometimes I feel I don't want to bother them too much. I feel ashamed [of] myself. . . . I['m] afraid I will meet a redneck people" (INT 7/7/99). Likewise, Ahmad felt that Cleary had been racist to him in class. He was also afraid of facing racism and discrimination against foreigners in the workplace:

> There are many people here, they are qualified, they are capable of this, a good job, but they can't give it to them because they are different, you see. . . . Even people who are qualified from other countries when they come here they put them down. (INT 5/13/00)

Academic advising and psychological counseling can play a role in supporting immigrant/refugee students to persist in community college courses. However, students' primary interactions occur within the classroom, which at the community college is increasingly the domain of part-time faculty. The community college's reliance on a part-time adjunct workforce has direct consequences in the classroom. It is difficult for a part-time instructor with little institutional support or preparation for teaching second language writers to successfully teach students with a wide range of educational levels and career/educational objectives. In BW3, Cleary's position in the college made it difficult for him to tailor the curriculum to address the needs of such a wide range of students. Furthermore, it is unrealistic to think that composition instructors can also teach word-processing, Internet, and other computer skills.

## Discussion

This study illustrates some of the pedagogic challenges of the contemporary ESL basic writing classroom, a contact zone comprised not only of diverse students, but also of marginalized adjunct faculty. Educational attainment levels function as yet another dimension of the contact zone, one which it is important for educators and policy makers to consider carefully. The presence of well-educated immigrants in the

community college writing classroom is consistent with trends in participation in adult education, which show that students with the highest educational attainment levels tend to participate the most (Creighton and Hudson, 2000, p. 2). The high student attrition rate in BW3 highlights the failure of teaching approaches that do not individualize instruction to a wide range of adult students.

Faculty, especially part-time instructors, should be educated and supported to undertake this sort of curriculum development and teaching. Yet the global market conditions that are attracting more newcomers to the United States and into our educational system are also implicated in the increasing use of part-time faculty in higher education. This study argues for the consideration of these issues as a whole, not separating faculty working conditions and terms of employment from the quality of teaching in the complex world of the contact zone.

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| Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 | Week 7 | Week 8 | Week 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Hong.* No info available. | *Murat.* Less than BA. Visited Turkey. Planned to retake course. | *Rosa.* Less than BA. Stayed at MCC in physics course. | *Ahmad.* Less than HS. Goal: law degree. Did not return to MCC.<br><br>*Hye-Ra.* Grad degree. Goal: another degree in music. | *Petra.* Ph.D., philosophy. No goal given. Moved to another state. | Saky. *HS diploma.* Goal: police officer. Attended ESL 5. Returned to MCC but dropped out. |
| | | | *Sik-yu.* BA in political science. Goal: grad degree. | | *Susie.* Grad degree. Goal: special ed teacher in US. |
| | | | *Sylvia.* BA. Goal: graduate study. | | |

| Week 10 | Week 12 | Week 13 | Week 14 | Week 15 (last week) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Katarina.* BA. Goal: | *Irina.* Ph.D., | *Minji. BA* in design. Goal: | *Boris.* BA in engineering. | *Ali.* Some college courses. Goal: BA. Entered university |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| tax preparer. Took other MCC courses. | mineralogy. Retired.<br><br>*Jessica* No info available. | music teacher. Entered university next semester. | Retired. Left to care for ill wife. | next semester.<br><br>*Atsuko.* BA. Goal: teacher in Japan. Planned to return to Japan with family. |
| | *Olga.* MD/ Ph.D. Retired. Left for vacation. | | | *Leila.* HS diploma. Goal: BA. Entered university next semester.<br>*Rana.* HS diploma. Goal: BA. Entered university next semester. |

[Table 1]

**Figure 1. Basic Writing 3 attendance**